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The lamentation of “little fishes”

Salisbury

[1861]

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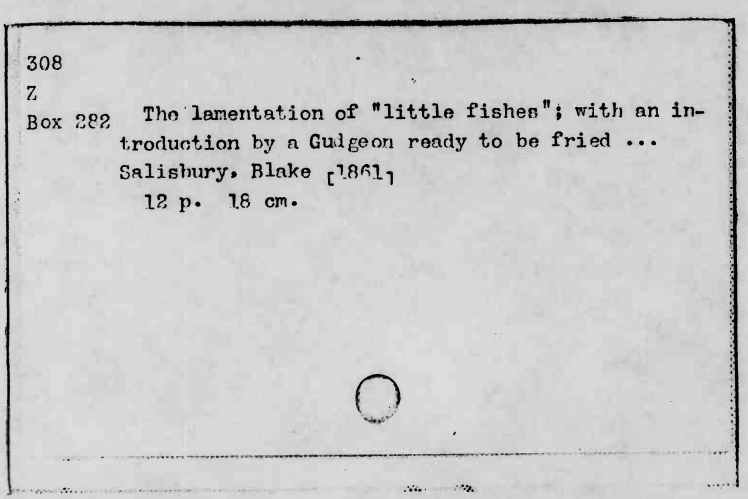

308
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Box 282 The lamentation of "little fishes"; with an introduction by a Gulgeon ready to be fried ...
Salisbury, Blake [1861]
12 p. 18 cm.

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THE

LAMENTATION

OF

"LITTLE FISHES,"

WITH AN

INTRODUCTION

308
Z
Box 282

BY

A GUDGEON READY TO BE FRIED.

"O Hoopoes! come and fly between me and the Sun, that I may be protected from its rays by the shadow of your wings; whereupon the King of the Hoopoes said, 'We are but little fowls, and we are not able to afford so much shade.'"

PRICE FOURPENCE.

SALISBURY:
FREDERICK A. BLAKE, PRINTER, MARKET PLACE,

This little book was written upon hearing that "a poor author and his daughter *died starved!* owing to a Reviewer or Critic condemning the work which nearly took him his life to write. After his death and that of his child, his MS. sold for a large sum!" Too late to do good.

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June 26, 1930 DA

A LITTLE FISH

WRITES THE

INTRODUCTION TO THE READER.

I am, alas! one of those offending fish who feed the great fish. I garnish a great fish at a feast. I come in a shoal amongst other small fry; or little authors. I get my bread at the Poet's Corner, in Eton. I can write to flatter. I can write in temper if I like. I only get my bread from the crumbs which fall from great men's mouths—I pick up these morsels. My works are tiny, and fit only for boys, not critics, and actors at a great man's table, like Lord Cod and Marquis Carp; and the reason I am not fit for the critic's table is this—*they eat me up at one jaw, and, alas! I have no money to pay down to save my little life, although it is only a little money that would save it.*

I confess I have written in spleen the Lamentation of the Little Fishes. By the term little fish, I mean poor garret authors; by great fish, I mean critics and reviewers. I wish to prove I can bear a good deal of cutting and scaling, by writing the *little Lamentation very confusedly. I stuffed it! I have cramm'd it! and at last dressed it up in every quotation I could tack heedlessly together.* I come out, not frightened like an innocent fawn at the keeper, at his fixed eye, at his gun, fearing an end of me at once; but to shew, *if critics must reign, let them! and let them, too, like a schoolmaster, correct, add, round, and fine down,* the manner in which I wilfully have run one idea into another, one link into another, just to shew *critics in this age of civilization it would be more liberal to correct than condemn poor authors.* But how? by critics mending the faults, and then letting the poor garret authors' work have a chance of sale. This is the age of

education, and the age of iniquity, too. An age, too, where no man is content with his station. But poor authors must be contented. The poor author finds a critic is an abusive man; *he opens wide his great voluminous mouth to make sport of blunders, instead of schoolmaster-like as he reads to correct all mistakes.*

I should like every critic to peep at us poor authors. We are starving in a room five stories high, eating nothing, to enable us to buy paper, pens, and ink; to earn a pittance by, as I do. Critics in this age of increase of knowledge, should spare poverty of thought, as the humane man does, who feeds a beggar, and forgives the beggarly dress of a beggar. But no; a critic sends the moneyless author to inferno. He never thinks, as he condemns a poor author's works, the poor author has a sick child in a sunless and almost lightless garret, dying of fever and hunger, by the condemnation of a pampered critic, or the luxurious reviewer. This age is educated. Then *let the world, when a book comes forth, judge that book for themselves*, and not as the world does like a baby in leading strings, get a reviewer's or a critic's opinion first of a book, lest they should not be pleased with it, and what is worse, to feel, "fear they are no judges of merit or demerit," so rest on the judgment of the critic's word and opinion, and in his written abuses or praises of a book. Everybody can review a book for themselves; it is more manly to do so, and more enlightened to think so. Why should men, more learned than critics in thousands of instances, bow down to a reviewer who may be more spiteful than liberal or learned A snarling philosopher scans a book, and to be sure may, like a sot, say what comes into the head!

I have heard many a poor despised author say, "My book never sold until I myself abused it." This, perhaps, is the fundamental *use* of a critic and reviewer, to *abuse the labours of a man, that his labour may sell.* It is hard to bear this cross-grained praise. A great publisher puts up a poor author's MS. on a shelf, he waits until the turn comes to criticise it. After three months have elapsed, the poor author is at the publisher's. The trembling looks and beating heart of the poor author bespeak his anxiety, The palavering, easy-tongued master smiles out, "It will not do! It is of no

use to us! The title is against it! It is clever! but too hard upon truths. The world only likes what does not hit at them, or mock their evil ways." The poor thread-bare author shrinks to nothing. He goes up into his garret, and there to see his sick child, feeling the publisher's reproofs, as well as his saying, "We would take the work on our own risk, if we knew that some great author backed you up!" The child sees the breadless father. She looks by her face as if she said, "Is it sold? Is it published to pay its own costs?" A sigh from him discovers to her he has the MS. under his arm. His child turns on her straw bed. She weeps—she sobs—she is hungry—she is thirsty—and so is the author. She is too weak in body to ask even for a cup of cold water—fever burns her—her tongue cleaves to her mouth—while his heart is breaking, for a cup of cold water is all he has to give her. *Sorrow, starvation, and death follow.*

Those are a few of the evils attending the opinion of others, or a critic's sarcastic influence over the public publishers. I have written the Lamentation to see if any critic will act schoolmaster, and not avenger, on the poor author's learning.

I have said my say fearlessly, although a fish of no note, of no size, and of no weight in the scales, to assure the reader of one thing, and little authors.

I am their humble servant, a little fish without bait, but too often taken to bait with,

A POOR LITTLE GUDGEON.

FEB. 15, 1851.

THE

LAMENT OF THE "LITTLE FISHES,"

OR AUTHORS,

BEFORE THE SCIENTIFIC CRITICS,—COD AND CARP,

BY A

LITTLE GUDGEON.

"More false and nice than weight of weather,
To the hundredth atom of the lightest feather;
Or measuring of air upon Parnassus,
With cylinders of Torricellian glasses."

Revered and worthy critics of the deep,—your sought-out tongues are selected from all other of the moving "*living waters*" to give refinement to the table of the wealthy and nice: kindly and generously, in your high position you would politely have all other prating tongues, as racy, tasting, politically, and beneficial as your own to society at large, hoping, too, like Horace's "*just man,*" "*to let the world have no opinion at all,*" in this age of conciliation, where the world is not allowed *a side* or decision of character to *keep a side.*

Having gone so far, permit us, "*little fishes,*" to say something more, adding in our gabble no flattering to you in advowing. Greatly as we honour your palacious truth expounding wit, it is certainly a large self-esteem, the insinuation of ourselves without protection to you, and where, too, our boldness without equity or previous elevation by you, is so apparent to all observers in our swimming before you in huge, stunning, thick shoals, free travellers, brought in with the transparent whiteness of the innocent spreading toppling serfs, trusting that our piteous cry in the reading stalls will not be met with "*a Lucian well skilled in scoffing,*" and who may sneer at us, and say vapouringly,

"Friend that's your folly, which you think wit."

We cannot (however uncrupulous our numbers) but admit, we run a race much flurried under the Plebian banner of self-raising.

* Natural History gives to the Carp and Cod well-flavoured tongues and eatabl "tit-bits."

It is our unhappy habit before critics of profound thought and station. Who is otherwise? if they feel their little worth of being timid.

Alas! our scales, too, are tiny, and many come without scales of justice, pushing, and waiting as our supposed bounden duty is, most submissively for *your noble benign weight to support our side,* for we are the minimus one, wanting your glittering scales of balance, to our hook thrown to catch your courted tongues, never censured, but by those without gout, or by a malcontent out of livery, or by silk "*stockings of blue.*"

"The muses, from their hill,
Wonder'd who thus had stolen their skill."

The "*little fishes*" are always poor; but proud of your assistance and good will. We are not parasites, but meek "*little fishes.*"

"Qui norânt dominum, manumque lambunt."
(Who know their Sovereign, and will lick his hand.)

A tribe of miserable puny wretches we are ("*little fishes*") but the "*people of Cadara make timber of fish-bones!!!*" peradventure we too might increase rapidly did you recognize us but,

"Burning pride and high despair
Forbid the rising tear to flow."

At your not beaming on us, your triumphs and nurtured mind, still! noble Cod and Carp, lurking at our *seen not hearts is pride,* a weed so *rancorous and inquisitive* in us that Siranemerdane affirms

"Fish have a wonderful labyrinth of the ear for hearing."

(aside) of course for drawing in your praise. The hearing is not given for fear. Ah, no! we are not timid in shoals unless it is at this very precise moment, ah! we do shrink now, *we quake with trembling fear,* even in our *being* before a sensible critic. Every one is a critic gifted by nature to seize upon all things and matters by a remark, either vapid, petting, hating or loving, developing the restlessness of disposition, or the undisciplined ideas of the soul's undress on Lillyputian productions so voluminous as ours.

Before our critic's discrimination, we do hope, and in that vanity, hope it is but a shade of pious breathing, that we shall be appreciated and read without our being, by the Cod and Carp, concentrated into lump of malicious excoriations of the great, and sentenced to remain "*little fishes.*" We write for the benefit of Christian society. We send from us the "*Barbel*" (the attorney) a "*sullen fish,*" and with it the "*Monk fish,*" called by Du Bartes "*the cowled friar.*"

Think not in so doing, oh! right judging critics, that we "*little fishes*" are *ineolent,* in casting out those *shiny ones* from us. They dare not, of themselves, seek the pre-eminence of critics' tongues or

their love upon such fish for good reasons. The "*Barbel's sullen brains*," like its noted spawn,* may contain something in its distillations like the poisons of the Italian Exiles†—a poison whose subtle whimperings, often a "*six-and-eightpenny bate*" from those estates, gets by making holes and poverty insidiously, till the untaxed bill is produced to show the ravages done, instructed and by too often the "Cowled Friar, ' whose

"Silence sure may dwell,
With Monks and Abbots in the cloister'd cell."

But who, if with us, might have made "his calling" the necessity of our having absolute confessional dumbness in the "*house of La Trappe*," and so hush our lamentations in sombre gloom, which we are not particularly desirous of in the days "of aggression," everywhere. Though our present position is only equivalent to the "*little fish*," on Mark Anthony's rod, engaging the satire of satellites, from courtiers, who cannot, as queen Cleopatras did, give applause by putting the Cod or Carps admired size on the same hook, under the impulse of better specimens of fish

"If streams of warm affection flow."

Oh! fine hearted, sweet and illustrious tongues of the fathomless seas of knowledge,—whose sensitiveness on others is not cooled by the "*water system*" or stupified by the fallacious concoctions of zinc and magnetic powers, over ignoramuses pericraniums. Hide not longer your wit from us; let not our weak lispings of literature end in the "*cod sounds*" against us, and our bodies given to hospitals and alms as incurable plagues; but by your cordial nutrimental guesto raise us up to a shelf of reputation, and

"There shall we meet this dark world o'er."

Be merciful! feel for us! tell us ("*little fishes*") not again, our spawn "*is not worth notice*" in the literary world.

Tell us not we should leave our spawnings, our nurslings, to die in the drying atmosphere of non-entity, for it puts us ("*little fishes*") into "*a fry*" hotter than the nameless place. Tantalus was sent unto for his "*dish to the gods.*"

Oh! mystic critics, you are to us like that precious tree, which, being laden with juicy fruit over the head of Tantalus, do not torment us and like his punishment was, just as he grappled to taste its refreshments, "*it swung from him*," and his feverish touch, leaving Tantalus delirious from mortification, as you do us by scorning us and our doings.

* Natural History surmises the spawn of the sullen fish, Barbel, is not wholesome, also the Barbel has a leather, or parchment mouth.

† The Italian *Exiles* taught the Lover of Brinvilliers to distil poisons *so tasteless* they were not discovered when given to poison her father, whose estate and money was coveted.

Reflect refulgent critics, how much more then, do we "*little fishes*" devoid of Ulysses' prudent tongue, behold our masters taken from us feel it.

The critics' voice unto us, is as the fruit tree to Tantalus, we jump to get "*a smack*" of the scholastic gum, in the arrogance of hoping to obtain praise, and being thought passable, and afterwards permitted to recline revelling under its balmy nectar, in its legitimate syrup, not minus of the essential.

"Un brochet fait plus qu'une lettre de recommendation."
(*Of a great fish being a recommendation*)

upon a silver dish in all first courses garnished by us.

Our sole object is to "*rise and bite*," to taste, and feel, the Cod's famed tongue; and to earn such a compound of good from him, with his allies, the Carps, would be a privilege more than Nero's rich "*nightingale's dish*" of tongues. To us "*knowledge is never too dear*," and so wrote Sir F. Walshington; nor can we exist without the critics' benevolence, praise, or abuse. *Either* is a requisite and an advantage to those who search for display. We prefer praise, but do not obtain it.

"*The world*" only deigns to peep at and on "*little fishes*" *as an impudent unsavory, insignificant animalculæ not so presentable as the piscis volans (flying fish)*, for that fish wings itself aloft out of the heartless world's animadversions, whilst we, unfledged fishes have our seasons; we must come in, without pity, from the world. Still a few tears of feeling from the world shed a lustre so bright it would visibly entrance our worth, enlarge our crowds, or shoals, enticing us to try with the "*world's pity*," a second time to cook up a better dish, to place before the world and the gods in it than our condemned past ones.

Our trials multiply, as our oblivion gets nearer the edge; our vicissitudes have not poetical delusions to drag us over the mud of contempt; our very healths suffer materially in the pent reservoirs of the waters of Lethe. The "*black canopy over arching*," we scramble our ideas together, not rounded like the vortex of the Norwegian wheel, where ending nothingless is seen or felt.

Our nights are sleepless on the *breakers** as we draw near.

"My slumbers——if slumber is not sleep
But continuance of enduring thought."

Our courtships o'er! Our fabled *mountains of tradition*, are sent to an abyss, where our precious MSS. light the fire.

We quarrel amongst ourselves on phrenology. "*We take that subject to ourselves.*" Our mistakes are obvious, "frowning like overhanging precipices!" Our handwritings, what old antiquated pedagogues call "*pot-hooks and hangers*," fortunately our paltry wisdom is not essayed upon that lengthy uncertain leviathan sea of discussion writing.

* Critics.

Our screaming differences likewise between ourselves, over our note-books, are like the impetuous cataracts, they rush on whether or not "*two great authors may not have had the same*" Phantom idealism! just as the one we now borrow, and which often softens down anger with

"A smile that did his rising spleen disguise."

Then again heavily press our night's meditations, until dispelled by the glorious mornings' grey retiring curtain from off the earth's night's rest. Following comes the irrisistible rays of sun-light, warmth, pouring upon us its heat, to succeed in calling forth in our cold pensive natures, the witty poet's words,

"The sun's perpendicular heights illumined the depths of the sea,"
. . . . . &c.

driving us and burning us all "*little fishes*," parallel, to the Cod and Carp's criticising tongues. Our scorching heads hear they are vociferating to us in heat and warmth, saying, *You have soared too high, and presumed like eagles, to gaze upon the sun.*" "Die you bony soulless varlets!"

We hear no more, humbled and disconsolate, the gentle movement of our mother earth sends us with the demolished, sneaking expectations, rhymes, compositions, "*resources, with the poets corner, all downwards.*" The Engineer's whistle is heard, to tell us "*strike again,*" put forth your unexplored destinies, and your distresses, on a fresh sail.

"To fish the troubled streams anew."

There is but a small doubt, had we "*little fishes*" the mind or temper of Cœlius, we should crib our sciences, making a smile to be followed by tears, as he did, when feigning the gout, felt to his discomfiture the racking happiness for his falseness, "pain all over him!"

Can we feign learning. The science is an aching unprofitable trade until a century has passed the author's tomb, then it rises pointed out on a monument for ever, "*enduring slaves!*" who *worked and were unrewarded.* Ignorant little fishes cannot feign, neither do we address the wolf as the donkey did, we are upright originals, who abhor the "*make believe*" that the "*philosopher's stone*" is with us. No, we cannot even indulge in a corner of it to pilfer from. We mark every word of quotation to prove our cullings and admiration of the writers. *Besides wise and immensely "well read" critics know we are "fera naturæ."* Then pardon our naturalisms as you would the goths. We desire not the "*marble slab*" in the highway to denote our make, neither a pompous epitaph at our dingy unnatural netted martyrs' deaths. The goddess Pudicitœ guards us and our ill-devised diversions, so indecorous for the public eye, in those vast oceans where the

"Great God of waters! whose extended sway,"

gave us life, and we were formed to move in. There, too, are our *Critics.* We assume we have need of our pride with the ignoble floaters and bloaters. Their size and bodies of all bone! are not like timber to be seen by us "Fry."

We the unpatronized, uncultivated, who are doomed with minute bones, might do an injustice very unwittingly, whilst the good critics tasted us by our unhappy choking the ethereal, imperial, irrefractable immortals *whose sympathy we covet to adorn us.* Not that of scorn, when we choke the critics who exquisitely feel the *bony mouthfuls,* which eredicate any spiritualizing with us, "or stroking," as that fisherman, I. Walton, implored all to feel, and

"Handle us as if you loved us tenderly."

We are not devouring sharks! ! with murderous "*ribbonmen's*" inclinations. *Pigmies we are, pigmies in editions, pigmies in learning,* yet, now and then, without "*Baron Bragg's*" tongue, we little fishes garnish the Cod and Carp, not by books aggrandize we their flourishing meals, but *with our flat colourless brains giving a small relish to epicures' dishes.*

(Aside.) What would the critics wreak their overpowering tongues upon *if they had not us!* Not themselves; oh, no.

"The great do not eat the great."

The "*magi*" or critics' tongues must be sustained as well as us, then mitigate your rage upon our unworthy labours, by not scourging us in "*a fry*" or opening our leaves to only put the same to fire the furnace with which is to consume us in smoke and rubbish.

We plead, we lastly ask, to be admitted with the "*Tench*" (the physician) whose mesmeric powers cure in the issue of that puppet humbug assailment upon the credulity of the world,—or with Mistress Anchovy, whose "*saucy composition*" will always attend the great fish.

You erudite Cod and Carp, critics of sublime taste, who do not divorce the Tench or Anchovy from the literary table, hear and unite the pre-conjunction, the pre-cognition, the pre-existence of ours with the others, (baring the Barbel and Cowled Friar) and serve us up "*little fishes*" to feel the decisions of the preposterous bookworms over the minors in wisdom, who perish with a sunbeam, but revive at the dews. Then

"To be or not to be, that's the question."

Are we to be re-touched, re-weighed, re-schooled, re-moulded, re-fitted, re-served, re-susticated, or neither, before we all go withering off in a sliding scale of consumption; washed from the golden pebbles lately shadowed by the retiring sea foam, bearing along with us the pungent internal shame, inexpressible in sensation that our brains amount to only an impenetrable coverlid of *boasting youthful folly,* now dismantled by the lords of sagacious tongues ignus-fatuus, who wisely deem it *their hereditary right* to expound to the word and "*literary gaza*" and to parties who read not works for themselves, the melancholy fact in a piquant sally, the "*little fishes*" are "*floored!!!*" with

"Gentle blushes in the watery glass."

'Tis true! and, like Niobe, we weep! but, not like her, for children; *our sorrows are at the paucity in our language, a regret immeasurable; and at not sounding our periods, or, having busied ourselves first in the mechanism of words.* The *loss, too, at* not being asked to the table of the *great time ruler* of legislature, "*The Times,*" to keep us scandalous drivellers after fame from our plight of being unshelved, unbound, unsought, uncared for, and scattered by the expulsion from the Editor's etiolation which light has glided gradually away, leaving the grovelling, decrepid, unfledged race of "*little fishes,*" bulwarks, hollowed and dark. In the meanwhile, the *Critic meteor shines forth* in giving sentiments of

"Justice impartial,
"Despising the most wealthy bribes."

Had the reverse taken place, the Critics' celestial flame might have lighted us, and we, disgusting "*little fishes,*" no longer would have been "*disreputable trash,*" but blazing forth, resting like Papilionaceans (the wing of a butterfly) upon a beautful flower (the critics' word), and in an ecstasy at such fortune and fairy delight, we should have capitulated, singing with renewed vigour,

"Alina mini est egendium"
(*we have other fish to fry*)

If the Latin is spelt wrongly, *we only hear Latin. We never read it!* Under the radiant prognostications of "*better future doings,*" give to us, then, the well-felt, liberal superiority of your attainments over inferior, *instead of an exploding,* which opens upon us the same harshness with greater variety than Zoilus, the critic supplied his aspirants with "*you want punctuation and grammarian dictation,*" a knowledge of Homer, Tacitus, Socrates, Plato, Chaucer, Cicero, with a shout as loud in our ears, as a "*Bolatane,*"* poured furiously against the "*brainless little fishes,*" but pardon us poor little things,

"Since so few do what they ought,
'Tis great to indulge a well-meant fault,"

for modest non-university fishes, whose untaught, unsophisticated, *and open operative undress,* in a route *of discovery*; where no favoured great fish sinks into, because the *pathways of floating to renowned fishes, are traced out,* while our trackless footing is overlooked, being too rapid and without substance, to get a second proof print or page to be left behind for posterity to witness our ill success. So we are lost

Farewell ye glorious wonders of merit, Cod and Carp, from your respectful admirers, though despised by you, a few who review to dictate our downfall,

THE LITTLE FISHES.

* An expression for the noise of great guns.

FREDERICK A. BLAKE, PRINTER AND BOOKBINDER, SALISBURY.

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